NASA Lewis Research Center

OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES
PERSONNEL NEWSLETTER

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CAREER TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM CENTER UPDATE

TOUGHER INTERVIEWS AHEAD

By Fran Canzone, CTAPC Manager

For the Job Interviewee, there are good and bad surprises. Surprises open doors for those who are prepared; surprises fluster the ill-prepared interviewee. Since almost every job involves some type of planning, the less experience a person has, the more he or she should plan and practice. The intent of this article is to better prepare you to plan and practice for two types of interviews: the Behavioral and the Panel.

For Behavioral Interviews, you must know yourself very well. Interviewers are asking more situation questions such as, "Tell me about a situation where you convinced someone to use your solution to a problem." Follow-on questions could be, "Tell me about this situation and why you recommended the solution you did?" "What action did you take?" "Looking back, was that the best solution?" What would you recommend today if you had the same problem, and why?" A Behavioral Interview is based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior and the interviewer will be attempting to determine how you behaved in previous job related situations.

What Behavioral Interviewing does is to take you out of hypothetical situations for which you must devise an answer and puts you in a real problem-solving situation that you have experienced. This behavior in real life forces you, as the interviewee, to display what your reactions to problems have been. The information is more reliable than the old "What would you do if...?" Describing what you did in a situation tells a lot more about your thinking process than a speculative "what would you do?" question.

The Panel Interview--a job interview with more than one interviewer--poses special challenges. The interviewee must prepare for the dynamics of the panel, as well as the individual issues of each panel member. Here are some techniques that may help with such a challenge:

If possible, get the names and titles of each panel member in advance. Knowing the names and titles will put you at a great advantage. When you get into the interview and sit down, put the first name of each panel member down on paper, ergonomically--in a way that shows exactly who is where. They all have one name to remember--yours; and unfortunately you have two, three, four or five names to deal with--theirs. Attempt to use the name of each person once when you shake hands at the end of the interview.

When answering questions of the panel members, start by making eye contact with and responding to the person who asked the question. Then rotate to "meet eyes" with each panel member consecutively before rotating to the next person. Start and finish your answer with the person who asked the question.

Smile. Show enthusiasm. Anticipate the issues and agendas of each interviewer, based on his or her position within the company. Ask questions that will get an affirmative response, that create positive consensus, or that challenge the imagination of the panel members.

Remember these techniques for both the Panel and the Behavioral Interviews and be prepared for some typical interview questions:

- **"Tell me about your biggest weakness." Don't make the mistake of saying you have no weakness. Turn a weakness into a positive by explaining what you have done to turn it around. If your answer is followed by, "Tell me another weakness," your answers must again be positive.**

- **"What are your goals in your career?" Talk first-- about doing the job for which you are applying, then talk about longer range plans.**

The best way to handle all the interviews and answer the questions is to:

- **Know yourself and your achievements. Make a separate list of problems you solved, your actions and the results.**

- **Plan a structured way to present situations, describe the problem, describe situations existing before you solved the problem, and list the results of your actions.**

- **Always tell the truth. If you don't, you may be fired the day you employer finds out you lied.**

- **Practice, practice, practice. Practice with your CTAPC counselor; practice in front of a mirror; practice with a friend. It may not be a great idea to practice with someone who is very close to you (your spouse or a very close friend) because they may tend to overlook idiosyncrasies, mannerisms, and other dysfunctional actions and jesters that may be detrimental during an interview.**

As you prepare, don't forget to have some questions of your own, such as "When will you make a decision?" "What are the key objectives that you expect to see accomplished in this job?"

Remember that in the final analysis the decision of whether to offer you a job is a subjective one. If you are prepared by knowing yourself and your achievements and you practice telling others about them in a structured way, your chances of hearing "You're Hired!" are greatly increased. If you are interested in learning more about the Job Search Process, call or e-mail Cindy Cox, CTAPC Assistant, at pdrcicc@lerc.nasa.gov or extension 3-0009.

(Sources: RCI Connections and Cuyahoga County Library Info Place)"

UPCOMING CTAP EVENTS

Communicating Your Leadershiip
September 17
9 a.m. - 12 noon

Financial Planning
September 18
9 a.m. - 12 noon

2-Day CTAPC Workshop
September 23-24
9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Communications Skills to Enhance Your Career
September 25
9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Resume Workshop
9 a.m. - 12 noon

Government American Express Card Misuses

In 1996, the NASA Office of Inspector General (IG) launched an investigation into the use of Government American Express Cards. This investigation revealed a number of program requirement violations Agencywide. According to the IG report, many employees failed to pay Government American Express bills in a timely manner and/or used the Government American Express card for other than official travel or official travel-related expenses. As a result of the IG findings, the Center initiated steps to ensure that the Government American Express Card program requirements are followed and action to correct misuses is taken.

In order to ensure that all employees were aware of program requirements, an LeRC Bulletin, subject: Government American Express Card Requirements, was published in February 1997. This bulletin reminded employees of their responsibilities to use the Government American Express Card only for official travel purposes and to pay the Government American Express card bill in accordance with program requirements. It further indicated that instances of failing to pay just debts and misuse of the card are violations of the standards of conduct and would be referred to individual supervisors for appropriate corrective action.

Since February 1997, the Government American Express Card program records have been monitored. As a result, there have been several cases identified of employees who have been more than 60 days delinquent in paying the Government American Express Card bills. Delinquent amounts owed by Lewis employees were found to range from approximately $72 to $2500. In all cases, employees responsible for these delinquencies have received letters of counseling, warning them personally of their responsibilities regarding the payment of these debts. There have been a few instances of repeat offenders; i.e., their name is reported on the monthly American Express delinquency report after receiving a counseling letter. In such cases, employees are required to provide evidence that the bill has been paid or a repayment agreement has been established. Formal disciplinary action will be initiated if it is confirmed that the delinquency has not been resolved. The current table of offenses and penalties indicates the range of penalties of reprimand for a first offense, reprimand to 5 day suspension for a second offense, and a 5 day suspension to removal for a third offense of indebtedness.

No employees have been found to have used the Government American Express Ccard for other than official business since the February 1997 bulletin was issued. In such a case, however, the Government American Express Card will be canceled immediately and future applications to participate may be denied. In addition, appropriate disciplinary action, from reprimand to removal, will be initiated if misuse is found.

It is expected that the IG may review Government American Express Card program uses on an ongoing basis. In order to ensure that Center employees utilize the Government American Express Card program in accordance with established requirements, the Center plans to continue to utilize the procedures that are in place to identify and address program misuses. It is hoped that the warnings issued and the initiation of progressive discipline, when necessary, will eliminate Government American Express Card program misuses and abuses in the future.

LEARNING CENTER SPONSORS SATELLITE BROADCASTS

The Learning Center provides on-site training opportunities live via satellite for NASA Lewis Research Center employees and support service contractors. There is no cost to you or your organization for these videoconferences or any other Learning Center training. Course announcements describing upcoming satellite broadcasts are distributed via e-mail to the Directorate and Division secretaries for dissemination to employees approximately 1 month prior to the air date.

Learning Center Satellite Videoconference Training Schedule

Knowledge Management: How to Build and Measure It
September 25, 1997, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., OAI Auditorium
Produced by: The International Institute for Learning, Inc.

6th Annual Conference for Working Women: Gaining Excellence Through Teams
October 29, 1997, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m., OAI Auditorium
Produced by: The American Management Association

Creating Organizations That Support Great Work (featuring Dr. Margaret Wheatley)
November 19, 1997, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., Room 208, Building 15
Produced by: The International Institute for Learning, Inc.

In Search of Excellence in Project Management
December 10, 1997, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m., OAI Auditorium
Produced by: The International Institute for Learning, Inc.

The Learning Center, Organization Development and Training Office, is located in building 21, room 3. The hours are: 7:30 - 4:30 (Monday, Wednesday, Friday), and 7:30 - 5:30 (Tuesday and Thursday). Contact us at 3-2996/2997 or through our web site, www.lerc.nasa.gov/WWW/LC.

ASK TRAINING

How do I apply for training? Can I earn compensatory time or overtime while I'm in a training course? These are but a few questions that the Organization Development and Training Office (OD&TO) receives on a regular basis. In an effort to get the word out on training policies and procedures, the OD&TO will be publishing frequently asked questions. If you have a question you would like to have answered, send it to ASK TRAINING at Mail Stop 15-4.

How do I apply for training?

There are two ways to apply for training; one process is for on-site training sponsored by Lewis and the other is for off-site training sponsored by a vendor.

1. **On-site courses are announced through the course announcement process. Course announcements are sent by e-mail to all the Directorate, Staff, and Division Offices approximately 4 to 6 weeks prior to the course. The call asks for the Directorate and Staff Offices to submit nominations, in priority order, of individuals who should attend the program. If you are interested in attending the announced course,**

submit your name through your supervisor who, in turn, will submit it to your Division and Directorate Office. The OD&TO will then confirm participation of the individuals selected by e-mail. It is the participants' responsibility to notify their supervisor that they have been selected.

2. **Registration for off-site, vendor-sponsored courses; academic courses; and conferences are handled through the use of the NASA Form C-478 (Rev 11-93), Application for Training. The application should be submitted at least 4 weeks prior to the training. Once the application has been approved by the individual's supervisor, Division Office, and OD&TO, a tuition letter (purchase order) is sent to the individual. The individual is then responsible for registering him/herself for the course using the tuition letter as proof that NASA intends to pay for their participation. Registration should not be made prior to receipt of this letter. If a member is signing up for an academic course during working hours, Block 23 , Training Schedule (For Academic Courses Only) , of the Application for Training must be filled in.**

Can I earn overtime, compensatory time or flextour credit hours while I'm attending training?

Overtime, compensatory time, or flextour credit hours cannot be granted to compensate an employee for time in training unless prior written approval has been obtained from the Chief, OD&TO. Approval may be given only in accordance with OPM regulations (FPM Letter 551-17) which state that employees must be compensated for time spent in training:

1. **To meet identified deficiencies in the employee's performance in his/her current position. The training must be specifically designed to bring the employee's performance up to an acceptable level.**

2. **Required to provide an employee with knowledge and skills to perform (at an acceptable level) new duties and responsibilities added to their current position such as revised procedures, processes, or new equipment.**

3. **Required to retain or to obtain certification of eligibility where that is a requirement to maintain his/her current position.**

WORK INJURY COMPENSATION

NASA Employees who sustain injury, illness, or disease, directly caused by conditions of employment, are entitled to medical care, hospitalization, compensation for loss of wages due to disability, vocational rehabilitation in cases of permanent disability, and other benefits upon approval of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP).

An employee must promptly notify their supervisor of any job-related injury, illness, or disease and furnish written notice to their supervisor using a Form CA-1 for traumatic injury, or Form CA-2 for illness or disease.

Supervisors, upon notification of a job-related traumatic injury, should coordinate prompt medical care and provide assistance in completing the CA-1 or CA-2. Once the form is completed, the "Receipt of Notice of Injury" must be returned to the employee, and the form should be forwarded to the Office of Human Resources, Mail Stop 500-301. Notification of a claim must be submitted to the Office of Human Resources within 30 days of the injury or illness.

In the event of an injury or illness, medical care or first aid may be provided by the Medical Services Health Physician or by any duly qualified local private physician or hospital of the employee's choice within a 25 mile radius of the employee's residence or work site.

Claim forms are available by contacting the Occupational Medical Services Office, PABX 3-5840, or the Office of Human Resources, Carol Mehallick, PABX 3-2507.

ANNUAL LEAVE "USE OR LOSE"

The time of year has arrived when employees should review their annual leave balances, keeping in mind the 240-hour limit on the annual leave carryover balance. If it appears that you will have an excess of annual leave, the following information will be important to you.

EMPLOYEES:

Plan your leave for the balance of the leave year, which ends January 3, 1998. Follow up with your supervisor if you do not receive timely feedback on your leave request. When annual leave is denied, or approved leave is canceled, an alternate period of time should be scheduled. This should be done without delay.

Special attention must be given to schedule leave to avoid forfeiture of annual leave that is in excess of the maximum carryover allowed at the end of the leave year. Use an SF-71, Application for Leave, to request "use or lose" annual leave and submit a new leave request to update your leave schedule if your supervisor cancels "use or lose" leave you have previously submitted.

If you do not request leave, or do not use leave that was approved, any resulting forfeiture will be considered to be by your choice.

The U.S. Comptroller General's decision stated that Federal employees who do not schedule leave in advance and in writing, and who forfeit the leave due to exigencies of public business may not have that leave restored. The Comptroller General also stated that informal notification or verbal requests are not sufficient, even when extenuating circumstances exist.

SUPERVISORS:

Supervisors are expected to assist employees in planning and scheduling the use of annual leave on a year-round basis to provide for reasonable vacation periods and to ensure the use of leave that employees might otherwise forfeit.

Take prompt action on leave requests. Ask the employee to resubmit a leave request for another period if you have had to deny a request and take timely action to approve rescheduled "use or lose" leave. SF-71's which include "use or lose" leave must be dated no later than November 22, 1997.

Request an approval of an "Exigency of the Public Business" if you see no alternative to cancellation of employees' leave which could result in a loss of leave. An "exigency" proposal must be approved by the Center Director before you cancel "use or lose" leave that cannot be rescheduled before the end of the leave year.

CARRYOVER OF EXCESS ANNUAL LEAVE

Unused earned annual leave may be carried over from one leave year to the next. However, the amount is limited by Federal law to 240 hours. Under certain conditions, excess leave may be carried over. There are certain regulatory requirements which must be satisfied before an agency may consider approval of excess leave carryover.

1. **An SF-71, Application for Leave, must be on file with the employee's timekeeper, before the start of the third pay period prior to the end of the leave year (by November 22, 1997) documenting that the leave was scheduled and approved by the employee's immediate supervisor.**

2. **The Center Director is authorized to declare an exigency of business exists and thereby cancel the scheduled leave and in turn approve excess leave carryover.**

In such cases, the immediate supervisor must prepare a memorandum addressed to the Center Director requesting cancellation of the leave due to an exigency of business, noting that no other employee can carry out the work; a description of the effects of postponement of the work; specifying the number of hours of annual leave involved in the request; and the beginning and ending dates of the exigency. The original SF-71 which recorded the scheduling of the leave must be attached.

Carryover of excess leave may also be approved in the event an employee's injury or illness prevented the taking of annual leave before the leave year's end. In such cases, the official authorized to approve excess leave carryover is the Deputy Director for Operations. An immediate supervisor requesting excess leave carryover due to injury/illness must request approval of carryover with a memorandum to the Deputy Director for Operations with the original signed, approved SF-71 attached.

In October, the Office of Human Resources will issue an alert memo to the Center staff providing detailed instructions on the specific procedures to be followed.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE TSP LOAN PROGARAM

Recently, there were some changes made to the TSP Loan Program. The following highlights these changes and explains how to apply for a TSP loan. It also includes tips on how the ThriftLine can help you with the process.

What's new in the loan program?

Two types of TSP loans are now available--*general purpose loans* and *residential loans*. General purpose loans can be used for any purpose. They require no documentation and are available for a repayment period of 1 to 4 years. Residential loans are only for the purchase of your primary residence. They require documentation and have a repayment period of 1 to 15 years.

Older TSP publications and forms still in circulation may refer to four types of loans: medical, educational, financial hardship, and residential. The first three loan purposes have been eliminated and replaced by the general purpose loan. Other aspects of the TSP loan program--such as the minimum and maximum loan amounts and the rules for borrowing--have not changed.

How do I apply for a loan?

<u>Phase 1</u>

- **Read the booklet *Thrift Savings Plan Loan Program* to make sure you understand the loan provisions.**

- **Complete the Loan Application (Form TSP-20), available from your personnel office or the TSP Web site at http://www.tsp.gov. Use the July 1989 Loan Application until the form is revised. For a general purpose loan, leave item 13 (purpose of loan) blank. To apply for a residential loan, check "Purchase of primary residence." Keep a copy of your completed Loan Application and send the original to the TSP Service Office.**

- **Make sure your agency has submitted your correct address to the TSP--your check will be sent to the address in your TSP account record.**

<u>Phase 2</u>

- **Carefully review the Loan Agreement/Promisory Note (Form TSP-21) and Loan Payment Allotment Form (TSP-22) that you receive from the TSP Service Office. Sign and date both forms, keep a copy for your records, and return the originals to the TSP Service Office.**

- **If you requested a residential loan, complete and return Form TSP-21-R, Residential Loan Documentation, and supporting documents.**

How long does it take to get a loan?

Plan ahead. It generally takes 6 to 8 weeks to get a loan. Loans are disbursed once a month, about mid-month. The month in which your loan is disbursed depends on when the TSP Service Office receives all the completed and signed materials necessary to approve your loan and schedule it for disbursement. Your loan must be approved by the fourth business day of the month in order to be paid that month.

How can the ThriftLine help me?

The ThriftLine is an automated telephone inquiry system available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The phone number is (504) 255-8777. You will need your Social Security number and your Personal Identification Number (PIN). If you have forgotten your PIN, you can use the ThriftLine to have a new PIN mailed to you.

- **When you are ready to apply for a loan, the ThriftLine can tell you the current loan interest rate and the amount you may be eligible to borrow. The current loan interest rate is also available on the TSP Web site.**

- **After you apply for a loan, the ThriftLine can tell you the status of your loan request and when your check was mailed.**

PIN Numbers, PIN Numbers, PIN Numbers

In addition to the various Personal Identification Numbers (PIN) you have been issued, you were issued one from the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Board and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Your TSP PIN number can be used to process interfund transfers, check account balances, check status of TSP loans, etc.. The OPM PIN number can be used to access Employee Express to change Federal tax withholding, state tax withholding, direct deposit of net paycheck, financial allotments, home address, FEHB and TSP year round transactions, as well as Open Season changes.

AREA CODE CHANGES

If your area code has been changed from 216 to 330 or 440, please complete form C-405a, available from your Division Office. This information will update your personnel information, as well as the emergency notification listing, which is maintained by security.

If you have lost or forgotten your PIN, you cannot access either the TSP Thriftline or Employee Express until you have a new number assigned. To request a new PIN:

- **TSP - call (504) 255-8777 and select "account activity" from the main menu and enter your Social Security number. The Thriftline will ask for your PIN, Press 1 to request a new PIN. You will not be able to access your account until you have the new PIN. Your new PIN will be mailed to you. You can also use this method if you never knew what your PIN was. (The Thrift Plan assigned a PIN to each account holder in the November 1994 participant statement.)**

- **Employee Express - call (912) 757-3030, and the OPM Help Desk will assist you in acquiring a new PIN. Your new PIN will be mailed to you. As with TSP you can also use this method if you never new what your PIN was. (OPM issued PIN numbers to all employees in June 1996.)**

We receive many questions regarding the PIN numbers and confusion as to using the TSP PIN for TSP changes in OPM's Employee Express. They are two separate applications with different PIN numbers. If you request a new PIN from either TSP or OPM, you can change them to one which is easier to remember.

NEW WEB SITES

www.tsp.gov - Many products and forms are available at the TSP Web site. Some of the materials on the Web site are more current than the printed documents. In many cases, the changes in the revised or updated documents on the Web site are not significant and the earlier printed versions may still be used. Participants may download and use any form that is available on the Web. The forms should then be submitted either to OHR or the TSP Service Office, whichever is appropriate and stated on the form.

www.employeeexpress.gov - This site offers all of the transactions available in Employee Express. They include changes to Federal and state tax withholdings, direct deposit of net paycheck, financial allotments, change of address, TSP and FEHB changes. The site is extremely easy to use and saves not only your time, but also that of OHR and Payroll personnel.

NASA EXTERNAL AWARDS

Every quarter, the Center receives requests for nominations for a wide variety of non-NASA awards. A call letter with nomination criteria summaries is sent to the directorate offices for distribution. Please call the Awards Office at 433-2488 for specific information.

The following is a list of non-NASA External Awards solicitation due next quarter, October to December 1997:

Federal Engineer of the Year Award
Executive of the Year Award
AIAA Awards
Frank G. Brewer Trophy
Cliff Henderson Award for Achievement
Vannevar Bush Award
Robert H. Goddard Memorial Trophy
Roger W. Jones Award for Executive Leadership
Society of Women Engineers Awards
Alan T. Waterman Award
Engineers' Council Awards
Donald L. Scantlebury Memorial Award